



Cliffside view: A segment of the wall on the east side of Badaling which is not open to tourists. Though part of the wall has collapsed, people can still see how centuries ago builders used the rocks on the mountains as a natural part of the wall, and chose steep terrain for the erection of forts.

Legal standards for Wall upkeep

Sections in Beijing to be better protected

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

The local regulations to protect the 629 kilometres of the Great Wall located in the Beijing area, which is a significant breakthrough as they have set legal standards for the protection of one of China's best-known symbols.

Luo Zhenwen, vice-president of the China Great Wall Society and a renowned expert on ancient architecture, said: "It's definitely a good start. The new regulations will give a powerful legal mandate for the protection of the Wall."

The new regulations were enacted by the Beijing municipal government to preserve the sections of the Great Wall within the municipality of Beijing, which were built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Although in better condition compared with the sections in many other provinces, the 629 kilometres worth of Great Wall in Beijing still face unprecedented devastation, said Luo, who was in charge of mapping out the renovation blueprints of Badaling, one section of the Wall in northwestern Beijing, in 1952.

"There were few tourists in Badaling at that time. But now, surrounded by crowded parking lots and dense stands, the natural beauty of the Wall is partially infringed upon by the disorder in tourism management," he added.

It's reassuring to know that about 200 million yuan (US\$24.1 million) has been raised to relocate the parking lots and buildings near the Wall.

"The law has clearly defined who is responsible for protecting the Great Wall, what kinds of activities are detrimental to the Wall and thus are forbidden, and which kinds of penalties should be enforced," said Dong Yaohui, secretary-general of the Great Wall Society of China.

The regulation also highlights the protection of the environment around the Wall and the range is defined, said Dong.

There were no clear-cut legal provisions before, thus making it difficult for conservationists like Dong and others to acquire legal support for their protection activities, he said.

Dong and other members of the society called for legislation to protect the historically monumental structure, after a team consisting of 20 experts and 30 journalists finished a 45-day investigation trip along the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Great Wall last October. The field study was organized by the Great Wall Society of China.

"We found that the Great Wall is crumbling, unable to withstand natural deterioration and calamities caused by people," said Dong, who headed the investigation team.

Cao Dawei, a professor from Beijing Normal University, said after the trip: "Most people are law-abiding. The major problem is that they have no idea what it takes to protect their cultural heritage. So we need some laws to tell people what they should do, and to stop their activities from destroying the Wall."

Over the past few years, Cao and other experts have discovered a number of problems that are troubling. Great Wall bricks are crated off by local rural people to build their houses, sheep corrals and pig sties. Some parts were demolished to give way for the construction of roads and residential buildings.

Bricks from well-known sections of the Great Wall carved with people's names have become souvenirs. Rubbish is strewn over the battlements.

According to Dong, unlike other cultural relics that are geographically concentrated, the Great Wall with its massive length can never be locked away or supervised by only one administrative unit. Therefore, local governments at both the county and township levels bear a heavy and important responsibility to protect it.

The Great Wall is actually a series of walls built and rebuilt by different dynasties over the past 2,000 years. Construction began in the reign of China's first emperor, Ying Zheng of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), and lasted into the Ming Dynasty.

The parts built before the Ming Dynasty have nearly disappeared. The Ming sections, which spiral about 6,300 kilometres from northeastern to

northwestern China, comprise what is typically considered the Great Wall by common people.

Dong said there were about 30 kilometres of Great Wall in Beijing that had been exploited as tourist destinations. The new local regulations focus specifically on protecting the wilderness parts of nearly 600 kilometres worth of the Great Wall.

"Those which have been used as tourism destinations, like Badaling and Simatai, are being protected in some level because at least no one will remove their bricks. The provision they should pay more attention to is 'to keep it as it looks during the renovations.'

"But those which are not formal tourism spots need better management with the help of the law, such as Huanghuacheng and Jiankou. Over 20,000 people climb the Huanghuacheng part every year along its ruined path. More footsteps there will only add more damage," Dong said.

"The legislation signals a good start for enhancing the efforts to protect the Wall, but people must follow the rules and the regulations must be effectively enforced."

Dong also noted that the local Beijing rules only apply to those sections within the municipality. Most segments of the Great Wall are located in mountainous areas in other parts of the country.

Eighteen years ago, a then-27-year-old Dong hiked for 508 days with two of his friends, traversing the entire length of the Ming Dynasty Great Wall.

Of the roughly 6,300 kilometres of the Wall that once ran from Hushan in Dandong, Liaoning Province, to Jiayuguan in Gansu Province, only one-third is still standing. The rest are either in ruins or have completely disappeared, Dong said.

Sun Ling, director of Policy and Regulation Division under the Beijing Bureau for Cultural Heritage, explains the details of the protection regulations in an interview with William Lindesay, founder of the conservation group "International Friends of the Great Wall."

Q: What is the main conservation principle of the new regulations?

A: We will work to retain the present appearance of the Great Wall as we have inherited it. If a section of wilderness Wall is structurally stable and its vegetation quite mature and healthy, we should not interfere with this historical state. Some sections of the Great Wall look too new after repairs. The historical appearance is destroyed. Keep it as it looks means retain and stabilize, but not rebuild.

Q: Some have the notion that the new regulations will forbid people from walking all of the

600 kilometres of unmanaged Great Wall in the Beijing region. Is that true?

A: We don't mean to do that. While people have a right to see their cultural heritage, we have the responsibility to protect the Wall not only for the present, but also for future generations. So wilderness Wall sections cannot continue to be a free-for-all.

Years ago, few people ventured to the wilderness Wall, but with the development of our economy and higher living standards, lifestyles have changed, and people have visited more "unmanaged" Wall areas.

There has been ad hoc construction of all manner of things, from booths to ladders, restaurants to TV aerials, without restriction.

Some farmers charge visitors to access the Wall in the name of stepping on their farmland. Visitors too have damaged the Wall with their litter and graffiti, and even their footsteps.

We have to save the Wall from such damaging actions by introducing management mechanisms.

Q: Extreme conservationists might say that Beijing's Great Wall would be best preserved from the modern attack it has come under if it was to become a "museum" that nobody can access. Do you agree?

A: We plan to select one or two outstanding sections of Great Wall within the municipality and designate them as strictly protected areas. They will be preserved as historical monument sites, and public access will be strictly prohibited. Only bona fide researchers will be able to visit such sections.

Q: One of the articles states that the governments of counties (or districts) and the townships within them along the Great Wall can assume responsibility for maintenance and management. Why?

A: In the past, it was the Beijing Bureau for Cultural Heritage that held centralized management. As local tourism booms,

we don't have the manpower or funds to meet the demands.

As a result, local counties and townships must assume responsibility for their sections of Wall if they wish to have them remain accessible to the public.

The local county and township governments are obliged by the law to protect the Wall and its surroundings. For example, a township government should make the site safe by doing minor restoration work and defend the environment of the Wall.

Before opening the section to the public, they must file an application to us, which we will examine and hand over to the municipal government for approval. If approved, the section can become a "managed section" of the Wall and open to the public.

Through this, we aim at bringing all of the Wall under protection.

Q: What if a township doesn't want to assume responsibility?

A: In that case we will find the nearest village to sign a preservation responsibility agreement. The agreement will require the village's head to immediately report to his county-level bureau of cultural heritage any problem that has occurred. We will help find the fund for solving the problem if necessary.

Q: There has been destructive exploitation in recent years as the locals have tried to benefit financially from the Wall as a resource. Isn't this "local" approach going to be hard to make successful?

A: We can't expect immediate results. Our initial jobs are to publicize the rules and to make officials at the county and township levels understand the new measures and their role in the implementation process.

For example, Huairou District has a few sections of the Great Wall and many problems, so we need to have a Great Wall Management Committee there to start work.

The district held a meeting on July 26 and signed an agreement

to announce their adoption of the responsibility.

Q: As a geographer, I regard the reference in article 1 that "the Great Wall is to be protected in its setting" as a major step forward. I noticed that buffer zones and restricted construction zones will be demarcated, a move in line with the protection of Hadrian's Wall in England, which is defended against encroachment by an 800-metre buffer. Would you elaborate on this article?

A: We have decided to implement a 500-metre wide buffer within which all new construction will be prohibited. Beyond that, from 500 to 3,000 metres, construction will be restricted in order to preserve the landscape of the Great Wall.

As for projects built before August 1, 2003, they will be studied case by case. For example, some businesses acquiring the legal licences for developments with 30 or 50 year leases were made quite legally, so we will have to wait for those land-use rights to expire.

But for the buildings that were built illegally, we will work to have those demolished.

We won't be able to file lawsuits against owners of buildings that were permitted legally before August 1, 2003. But we will resort to court action against new violations of the buffer after August 1, 2003.

Q: These measures are the first regional ones to protect the Great Wall. But the Wall of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) crosses nine provincial-level regions. Do any other regions have plans to introduce Wall protection measures?

A: The State Administration of Cultural Heritage is currently drafting measures on preserving the entire Great Wall and it will be issued and implemented by State Council. The first draft is being made by the China Relics Information Centre.

It's a more complex matter, crossing provincial boundaries.



Protecting the Wall: Farmers employed as rangers to walk along the Wall picking up garbage, have a picture taken in front of a "green message" board placed beside footpaths leading to the Wall. It is part of the stewardship project at the Great Wall in Huairou District, Beijing, initiated by the International Friends of the Great Wall three years ago.

WILLIAM LINDESAY